

Drag-Racing Enthusiasts Get Reason to Celebrate

■ **Recreation:** Harbor Commissioners vote to allow a strip on Terminal Island, at least until April 1, 1995. Racing will take place from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sundays.

By LISA RICHARDSON
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Street racers applauded and cheered as the Board of Harbor Commissioners voted Wednesday to temporarily allow drag racing on Terminal Island—effectively creating the only legal drag strip in Los Angeles.

"As of right now, all five of you commissioners are our heroes," said Willie A. (Big Willie) Robinson, president of the National and International Brotherhood of Street Racers.

The strip will be on a site bordered by Navy Way, Seaside Avenue, Ferry Street and Terminal Way. Robinson said the strip could open within two weeks.

Racing supporters said the return of drag racing signaled the rebirth of a part of Southern California culture. Strips were popular in the 1950s and '60s, but disappeared over the years as property values soared.

Commissioner Steven L. Soboroff on Wednesday called speakers to the podium to nail down promises from the brotherhood on a dozen stipulations regarding insurance, financing and safety.

The brotherhood agreed to give the port a \$25,000 security deposit and pay about \$3,000 per month for port police services. Rent will be \$1 per month, although Robinson promised that he would not seek to remain at Terminal Island beyond April 1, 1995, when the monthly rent jumps to \$250,000.

Racing will take place from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sundays. Admission is \$5 per person, and no alcohol is permitted on the premises. For those who do not have cars, the Brotherhood arranges bicycle, go-cart and even foot races.

The National Hot Rod Assn. has agreed to sanction the program if the Brotherhood meets its safety standards.

For more than a year, Robinson—who is 6 feet, 6 inches tall and weighs about 300 pounds—attended Harbor Commission meetings dressed in his trademark leather vest, camouflage pants and black beret and try to wheedle a lease from the board.

The brotherhood ran a strip on Terminal Island from 1974 to 1984, when it was forced to leave because the port needed the site for an expansion project.

Robinson said he worked on drag-racing projects around the country until the 1992 riots convinced him that the city needed drag racing as an outlet for recreation and competition.

He asked the port if the Brotherhood could return to Terminal Island, and lined up a virtual rainbow coalition of support for the proposal. Car mechanics and business executives, police officers and gang members, the former publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* and restaurant owners all asked the board to bring back drag racing.

Outside the boardroom door, racers gleefully began to anticipate the automotive thrills to come. They recalled their admiration for competitors' cars, and the labor they put into their own. And they talked of the ease they feel with people of any age or race who love

Please see DRAG STRIP, B4

DRAG STRIP

Continued from B3

a fast car the way they do.

"See, it's not who you are, and it's not the money," said Charlie Hamilton of West Covina. "It's the work you put into a car. It's the blood, sweat and tears."

Hamilton was quick to add that while he and others have been racing on deserted streets, he will stop now that a legal drag strip is returning to the city.

Having a showcase for cars will give the city's youth incentives to take automotive classes in high school, said Randy Thomas, a representative for 8th District Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas.